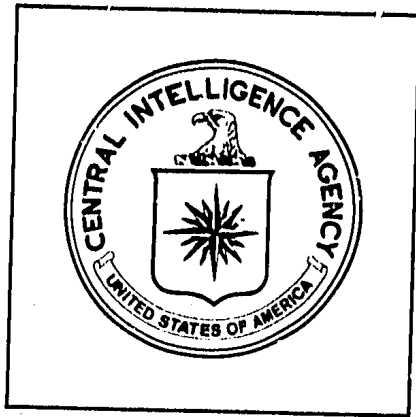


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USSR: Further Thoughts on the Backfire

There is mounting evidence that the newest Soviet bomber, the Backfire, may be a major modification of an older, intermediate-range bomber--the TU-22 Blinder--and not a new design. If so, this suggests that the Backfire is meant to replace the Blinder, and consequently would be used for missions on the periphery of the USSR rather than for intercontinental missions.

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There have been many indications since the late 1960s that the Soviets have been extremely dissatisfied with the performance characteristics of the TU-22. Consequently, [] they undertook a major modification of the aircraft. The result was a highly-modified Blinder--designated the TU-22M--distinguished by, among other things, variable-sweep wings. This modified Blinder entered production in 1969, the year the Backfire first appeared. []

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Two to three years is an extremely short period of time for a Soviet aircraft to complete development and flight testing, reach series production, and be delivered to operational units. To shorten the developmental period, the Soviets may have used available TU-22 Blinder components rather than designing and manufacturing completely new components, which would explain the physical similarity of Backfire and the TU-22.

The use of existing TU-22 components to the extent possible in the Backfire most likely would result in a higher weight for the aircraft than was previously estimated. This would in turn result in some decrease--how much has not yet been determined--in the estimated range of the Backfire.

The operational version of this aircraft--Backfire B--incorporates still further improvements over the prototype. The Backfire B is an improved version of the Backfire A--itself apparently an improvement on, and possibly a replacement for, the TU-22. It would seem that the Backfire is the aircraft that performs as the Blinder was intended to but never did.

The new information tends to confirm that the Backfire is best suited for, and is most likely intended to be used for, peripheral bombing missions.

If the Backfire B is, in fact, an evolutionary product of the Blinder design, some of the assumptions on which previous estimates of Backfire performance were based--particularly the idea that Backfire is a new, optimized design--may be faulty. Some of the areas that may need to be re-examined are fuel consumption and capacity, aerodynamic performance, and

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aircraft weight. A change in any of these could result in a change in the performance of the Backfire. A detailed analysis of Backfire performance is currently being undertaken.

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INDIA-USSR: Plans For Second Indian Space Launch

India and the USSR are pushing ahead with plans for the launch of India's second satellite, currently scheduled to be put into orbit by a Soviet rocket in 1978. The Indians had hoped to have an Indian-built rocket launch a satellite in 1978 but their space program has been plagued with problems in the development of propellants and guidance systems. These problems probably will delay such a launch until 1980.

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India's first satellite was launched from the Soviet Union last April on a Soviet booster. Two Indian scientists have been monitoring the satellite's performance at the Soviet ground station near Moscow since the launch. They were scheduled to return to India by late July with their data. These data will be valuable in preparing for the launch of the second satellite.

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